

The Innovation Hub Management Company (TIHMC) has established the Start-Up Support Programme (SSP) aimed at increasing access to finance for innovative, knowledge-based small businesses (SMME's) and projects. TIHMC has since partnered with the Department of Science and Innovation (DSTI) through their Strategic Industrial Bio-innovation Partnership (SIIP) Programme, which serves as a national coordinating, implementing and investment instrument to drive research, development, and innovation priorities in support of the growth of the industrial and environmental sectors of the Bioeconomy.

The purpose of the collaboration is for TIHMC to manage and implement the Bioentrepreneurship Support Programme through the Start-up Support Programme (SSP) at TIHMC.

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS FOR THE START-UP SUPPORT PROGRAMME

TIHMC, through the SSP in partnership with DSTI, is seeking to invest in high potential start-up businesses.

The funding will range from a minimum of R51,000.00 up to R300,000.00 per yearly project, with a requirement for applicants to clearly articulate their total funding needs for the next three years, including any Year 1 requirements exceeding R300,000.00.

The funding is for SMME support, product development and demonstrations under the following Research, Development, and Innovation Programmes:

- Bioconversion and manufacturing;
- Industrial Biocatalysis;
- Bioremediation technologies;
- Microbial bioprospecting; and
- Biorefineries.

This phase of funding is limited to companies incubated at TIHMC and companies interested in being part of TIHMC incubated programme. The overriding investment criteria includes, but is not limited to:

- a. Innovation and/ or knowledge-based business: Bioeconomy (Bioindustries),
- b. Job creation, demonstrable potential to result in the creation of good quality jobs.

- c. Proof of concept demonstrated, or proof of concept will be demonstrated with funding provided. (TRL≥3)
- d. A duly registered entity.
- e. Economic growth and national benefit: the extent to which the business will contribute to economic growth and socio-economic development must be detailed.
- f. Commercial potential market appetite or sufficient evidence of market potential.
- g. Defendable and demonstrable competitive advantage and/or intellectual property position and potential.
- h. Project team profile: the team's ability to successfully implement the project must be demonstrated.
- i. Applications from women, youth and people with disabilities are encouraged.

The proposal(s) should consider the overriding investment criteria as indicated above and at minimum include the following in line with the application form:

1. **Description of the business:** Clear articulation of the value proposition (to the intended market). State the problem or the gap that the business is going to address and then detail how the business will address the problem; must state the current options available for addressing the problem and how the business more advantageously addresses the problem or is different compared to these options.
2. **Novelty of the Project:** Describe the novelty of the product/offering compared to options currently available in the market that address the same problem – what makes the product/offering unique?
3. **Market Analysis:** Provide information on the market analysis, with particular emphasis on size of the market, competitors, target market/beneficiaries, barriers to entry, penetration, outline of the market development strategy)
4. **Details of Market and Buyers / Beneficiaries:** Provide details of who will buy your product(s) / target beneficiaries and any off-take agreements.
5. **Budget:** Provide detailed budget breakdown of the business, including other sources of funding and required funding (where applicable). The budget must include 3 years' projections of cash flow showing income and expenditure. This will also serve as a guideline for further discussion when the proposal has been selected.

6. **Details of the team:** this should clearly demonstrate the team's ability to carry out the project applied for and commercialize the innovation.
7. **Contact Information:** Names, emails, telephone numbers, postal address, etc.

The fundable activities shall include but not limited to:

- Initial proof of concept (The concept must be available) – **TRL 3**
- IP Support (Patent Protection), Sourcing of IP opinions
- Production of market samples and/or associated testing
- Conducting field studies to test the assumption made about the technology, market and/or customer need
- Refining and implementing designs
- Support of certification activities
- Piloting outputs and technology scale-up and techno-economic evaluation – **to TRL 8**
- Detailed primary market research
- Business Plan Development

Applications will be adjudicated based on merit, with particular emphasis on the SSP's investment criteria stipulated above. Applications should demonstrate compatibility with the goals of the SSP, both in terms of developmental impact and from a financial strength and growth perspective. An application pack containing an application form and checklist of documents required is attached.

Closing Date for Submission of Investment proposals: **23 January 2026.**

Applicants must submit an electronic copy of the application form and all supporting documentation by e-mails to the SSP office to Mr. Thato Hlokoa thlokoa@theinnovationhub.com, copy Mr. Sifiso Ntuli sntuli@theinnovationhub.com and your portfolio manager (if already part of TIHMC programme). Further Correspondence will only be made with shortlisted applicants. For general enquiries, contact Mr. Hlokoa by telephone: 012 844 0022 / Cell: 082 894 9345.

Please NB! No late/incomplete applications will be considered under any circumstances. TIHMC reserves the right to accept any application that meets the SSP mandate as per the call above.

SSP processes take up to at least 3 months.